

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 23890

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: DISSATISFACTION WITH THE AMENDED LOCAL ADMINISTRATION BILL

REF: (A) BANGKOK 23506; (B) BANGKOK 23567

SUMMARY: LOCAL ELECTIONS OF PHUYAIBANS AND KAMNANS WILL PROBABLY BE DELAYED. THERE IS GROWING DISSATISFACTION WITH THE AMENDMENT TO THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION BILL CALLING FOR ELECTIONS OF ALL PHUYAIBANS AND KAMNANS WITHIN NINETY DAYS. THE AMENDMENT WILL PROBABLY BE ELIMINATED, EITHER IN A SPECIAL SESSION OF PARLIAMENT OR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT REGULAR SESSION. END SUMMARY.

1. IT NOW APPEARS LIKELY THAT LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY BE DELAYED CONSIDERABLY LONGER THAN THE NINETY DAYS SPECIFIED IN THE AMENDED LOCAL ADMINISTRATION BILL WHICH WAS PASSED BY PARLIAMENT ON 7 NOVEMBER. THE ORIGINAL BILL REQUIRED ONLY THAT ELECTIONS BE HELD AS THE TERMS OF PHUYAIBANS (VILLAGE HEADMEN) AND KAMNANS (SUB-DISTRICT CHIEFS) EXPIRED. NOTE: UNDER THE OLD SYSTEM, THE PHUYAIBAN WAS USUALLY SELECTED BY CONSENSUS, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE KAMNAN OR SOME OTHER OFFICIAL, AND THE KAMNAN WAS SELECTED BY A TAMBON (SUB-DISTRICT) COUNCIL

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MADE UP OF THE PHUYAIBANS AND LOCAL LEVEL GOVERNMENT

CIVIL SERVANTS. END NOTE. DURING THE DEBATE OVER THE BILL IN PARLIAMENT, AND AMENDMENT WAS ADDED TO THE BILL STIPULATING THAT ELECTIONS FOR ALL KAMNANS AND PHUYAIBANS BE HELD WITHIN NINETY DAYS OF THE BILL'S PROMULGATION.

2. THERE IS DISSATISFACTION ON MANY SIDES WITH THE BILL AS IT NOW STANDS, AND GROWING SUPPORT FOR ELIMINATING THE AMENDMENT. HUNDREDS OF PHUYAIBANS AND KAMNANS ARE PRESENTLY IN BANGKOK PROTESTING THE BILL AND DEMANDING THEY BE ALLOWED TO SERVE THEIR FULL FIVE YEAR TERMS BEFORE STANDING FOR RE-ELECTION. MANY MPS CLAIM PARTICULARLY THAT NATION-WIDE LOCAL ELECTIONS WILL BE DISASTROUSLY EXPENSIVE (ESTIMATES PUBLISHED IN NEWSPAPERS RUN FROM U.S.\$11,000,000 TO US\$35,000,000). THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE DEMOCRAT PARTY (THE LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTY) WILL JOIN WITH THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES IN REMOVING THE AMENDMENT.

3. THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES MAY ACT IMMEDIATELY AND CALL FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION, OR THEY MAY DELAY THE PROMULGATION OF THE BILL UNTIL THE NEXT REGULAR SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. THE BILL DOES NOT BECOME LAW UNTIL SIGNED BY THE KING AND PUBLISHED IN THE GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, AND THE PRIME MINISTER CAN DELAY THIS PROCESS CONSIDERABLY. WHATEVER THE COURSE FOLLOWED, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT THE BILL WILL BE RETURNED TO ITS ORIGINAL FORM.

4. COMMENT: THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BILL FOR THAILAND, AND ONE WHICH IN PRINCIPLE HAS WIDE SUPPORT. IT IS A FIRST STEP IN ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION AND PROBABLY A PRELUDE TO REPLACING HIGHER LEVEL PROVINCIAL CIVIL SERVANTS WITH ELECTED LOCAL OFFICIALS. LOCAL ELECTIONS WILL ALSO SERVE TO ESTABLISH DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL, ADDING STRENGTH TO THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM AND MAKING A RETURN TO AUTHORITARIAN RULE MORE DIFFICULT. WHITEHOUSE

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